

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9595

INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 10206

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, FR

SUBJECT: THE LEFT RADICALS -- WHISTLING IN THE WIND

SUMMARY: THE LEFT RADICALS (MRG), JUNIOR PARTNER IN THE UNION OF THE LEFT WHICH UNITES THEM TO THE COMMUNISTS (PCF) AND SOCIALISTS (PS), CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE ESSENTIAL TO UNITED LEFT HOPES. FOR THE 1977 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, THE MRG BELIEVES THAT BOTH PCF AND PS WILL FIND IT USEFUL, FOR DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED REASONS, TO LET THE MRG ASSUME AN IMPORTANT ROLE. THE SAME REASONING APPLIES A FORTIORI TO THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OF 1978. WHILE MRG LEADERS ARE WILLING TO ADMIT THAT THE DAYS OF A MASS RADICAL MOVEMENT IN FRANCE ARE DEAD, AT LEAST SOME OF THEM SAY THAT AN ENCOURAGING NEW TREND CAN BE SEEN IN THE DEFECTIONS FROM THE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY OF SEVERAL CENTRIST FEDERATIONS. WE BELIEVE THAT THE MRG IS GIVING FAR TOO OPTIMISTIC A READING OF ITS CHANCES. END SUMMARY.

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1. A SMALL PARTY: RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH MRG NATIONAL

DELEGATES PROVIDE AN INTERESTING OPPORTUNITY FOR REFLECTION ON THE PARTY'S STATUS. ONLY TWO MRG LEADERS, PARTY PRESIDENT ROBERT FABRE AND VICE-PRESIDENT MICHEL CREPEAU HAVE ANY KIND OF NATIONAL PUBLIC RECOGNITION. WITH ONLY 25,000 MEMBERS (COMPARED TO 155,000 FOR THE PS AND 400,000 FOR THE PCF), THE MRG USUALLY ATTRACTS ABOUT A MILLION VOTERS (COMPARED TO ABOUT 5 MILLION FOR THE PCF). THE MRG CURRENTLY HAS FEDERATIONS IN ABOUT 70 DEPARTMENTS (OF 95), HAS AN ANNUAL BUDGET OF SOME \$30,000; ITS PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION INCLUDES 13 DEPUTIES AND 18/19 SENATORS.

2. A "HINGE" PARTY -- LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: DRAWING ON A HISTORICAL HERITAGE OVER A HUNDRED YEARS LONG, THE MRG HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO ATTRACT MORE VOTERS THAN ITS MEMBERSHIP AND BUDGET WOULD SEEM TO ALLOW. MRG MEMBERS BELIEVE THAT THEIR PARTY REPRESENTS THE LOGICAL SOLUTION FOR THOSE ANTI-GOVERNMENT VOTERS WHO ARE NOT WILLING TO VOTE FOR A "MARXIST" PARTY. TWO MRG SENIOR DELEGATES SAY THEY BELIEVE THAT CURRENT POLLS (WHICH THEY SAY GIVE THE PS SOME 30 PERCENT OF VOTER INTENTIONS, THE PCF SOME 20-21 PERCENT AND THE MRG ABOUT 4-5 PERCENT) SHOULD BE TRANSLATED IN THE FOLLOWING WAY: IF LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS WERE HELD TODAY, THE MRG BELIEVES THAT THE PS WOULD TAKE ABOUT 190 SEATS, THE PCF ABOUT 60 AND THAT THE MRG COULD HOPE -- AT BEST -- FOR 25 SEATS. THIS WOULD MAKE THE MRG, IN ITS VIEW, CRITICAL IN ALLOWING A UNITED LEFT GOVERNMENT TO COME TO POWER. "WE ARE," SAID ONE DELEGATE, "THE HINGE ON WHICH THE DOOR TO THE MATIGNON TURNS. MITTERRAND CAN'T GOVERN WITH ONLY FOUR SEATS OVER AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY." COMMENT: MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT WHATEVER OTHER INACCURACIES ARE INHERENT IN THE MRG'S ESTIMATIONS, THE MOST GLARING INACCURACY LIES IN THE LEFT RADICALS' UNDERESTIMATION OF THE PCF'S POTENTIAL. WE BELIEVE THAT THE SAME POLLS THE MRG CITES SHOULD BE INTERPRETED TO GIVE THE PCF AT LEAST 70 SEATS AND A MAXIMUM OF 15 TO THE MRG. WHILE IT IS STILL IMPOSSIBLE TO MAKE A USEFUL PREDICTION ON THE NUMBER OF SEATS WHICH THE PS MIGHT WIN, WE BELIEVE THAT THE TWO FACTORS MENTIONED ABOVE ARE SUFFICIENT TO VITIATE

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THE MRG'S CLAIM TO BEING A VITAL HINGE. END COMMENT.

3. A "BRIDGE" PARTY -- THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: MRG THINKING ON THE POLITICS OF MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS SEEMS MORE ACCURATE. THE MRG EXPECTS THE PCF TO CONTINUE ITS CURRENTLY UNSUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN TO FORCE THE PS INTO JOINT FIRST ROUND CANDIDACIES; THE PS, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS EXPECTED TO SEEK WAYS OF FORMING ALLIANCES WITH

VARIOUS NON-PCF, NON-MRG POLITICAL FIGURES (READ CENTRISTS). IN THIS PROCESS, THE MRG BELIEVES IT WILL PLAY THE ROLE OF A BRIDGE USEFUL TO BOTH SIDES. FOR THE PCF, THE MRG WILL DRAW OFF SOME VOTES WHICH MIGHT OTHERWISE HAVE GONE TO THE SOCIALISTS; FOR THE PS, THE

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MRG WILL SERVE AS AN ADDITIONAL SET OF TROOPS IN THE STRUGGLE TO DOMINATE THE PCF. IN SHORT, THE MRG FEELS THAT IT CAN SIMULTANEOUSLY SERVE THE INTERESTS OF BOTH OF ITS LARGER PARTNERS. IN THE PROCESS, IT WILL BE ABLE, OR SO ITS DELEGATES FELT, TO DEMAND A LARGER PIECE OF THE PIE (MORE UNOPPOSED LEFT CANDIDACIES).

4. A GROWING PARTY?: THE MRG BELIEVES THAT IT IS CURRENTLY ATTRACTING MEMBERS FROM THE CENTRISTS AND RADICALS IN THE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY. AS EXAMPLES, THE DELEGATES WE HAVE SEEN CITE RECENT EXAMPLES (THE VOSGES

FEDERATION OF THE CENTRE DEMOCRATE; A RADICAL FEDERATION IN THE MEURTHE-ET-MOSELLE) OF SUCH DEFECTIONS, CONTENDING THAT WHILE THE NUMBERS ARE SMALL, THE INFLUENCE OF DEFECTIONS BY LOCAL "NOTABLES" IS VERY HIGH. AND THAT, THE MRG FEELS, IS THE SECRET TO ITS FUTURE SUCCESS. THE SHORT-TERM GOAL IS THE ADDITION OF 3,000 NEW MEMBERS.

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5. COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS: WHILE THE MRG MAY HAVE A TEMPTING LINE OF ARGUMENT WHEN IT SUGGESTS THAT BOTH PS AND PCF ARE WELL SERVED BY THE CONTINUING EXISTENCE OF A RADICAL PARTY WITHIN THE UNITED LEFT, WE BELIEVE THAT SOME MRG LEADERS ARE FAR TOO OPTIMISTIC IN THEIR ASSESSMENTS. MANY SCENARIOS FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS SUGGEST THAT THE MRG IS LIKELY TO BE HELD TO ITS PRESENT FIEFDOMS (MOSTLY IN THE SOUTHWEST) WHILE IN THE LEGISLATIVES IT WILL PROBABLY BE AN ALSO-RAN. AND IF THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW, ISOLATED DEFECTIONS TO THE MRG, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME IMPORTANT TRANSFERS OUT, WITH PARTY VICE-PRESIDENT HENRI CAILLAVET AND SENATOR PAUL BROUSSE BOTH GOING INTO THE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY. WE BELIEVE THAT THE MRG WILL SPEND TWO YEARS MORE IN A MARGINAL SITUATION ON THE LEFT WHILE IT TRIES TO FIND AN IDENTITY OUTSIDE ITS HISTORIC, SMALL-TOWN REGIONAL BASE.
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